

John Fogerty: Revival

by Peter Stone Brown

On *Revival* (Fantasy Records), John Fogerty comes to terms with and maybe even makes peace with his past. In doing so he's created one of the best albums I've heard this year, and maybe in the past several years.

Fogerty's history has been one of pop music's legendary nightmares, involving several lawsuits, lingering bitterness between him and his former band mates in Creedence Clearwater Revival, deals and comebacks that often fizzled into nothing. That he survived at all and continued to make good and often great music (and for seven years he didn't) is something of a miracle. While Fogerty has been criticized for his treatment of the surviving members of Creedence, most notably for refusing to perform with them at the ceremony their induction to the Rock And Roll Hall of Fame, there's never been any doubt from a musical standpoint that Fogerty was the prime force, the genius behind the band's success. On his first solo album, *The Blue Ridge Rangers*, which was a terrific album of country and gospel covers, he played every instrument himself and if there was a difference in sound, it was undetectable.

Fogerty has always been a rocker through and through, but one whose music reveals a vast knowledge of rock and roll and all its contributing forms. Simplicity is the key to both his music and his lyrics. His gift is making it seem effortless. Every word, every note flows naturally. His best songs always gave you the feeling you've heard them all your life and the songs on *Revival* are no different. All his powers are intact and he may actually be rocking harder than ever. At 62, his vocal powers remain remarkably intact and his guitar work is equals any of his earlier recordings if not surpasses them. *Revival* features a small, basic band including the great Kenny Aronoff on drums and Heartbreaker Benmont Tench on organ and electric piano.

While the sound on *Revival* is the same mix of Southern swamp, mixed with Memphis soul and touches of country and gospel, he's explored all along, the emotional territory of the album is the first years of the 21st Century, an America as well as a world gone wrong. Sometimes it's way out front and sometimes lurking in the background, but the backdoor Fogerty once looked out of is now closed and locked, the blinds drawn. The small town American vision is still there, but clouded over by fear and suspicion.

The album starts with “Don’t You Wish It Was True,” an irresistible song that starts with a relaxed gospel-tinged rhythm guitar, and by the chorus shifts to a rhythm reminiscent of “Proud Mary.” In a sense, the song is Fogerty’s version of “Imagine,” but he avoids all rhetoric and doesn’t hit you over the head with it, drawing you in instead.

The following track, “Gunslinger” draws you in the same way. The setting could be a western town, but it’s the country he’s talking about in the all too clear first verse:

Lookin’ out across this town/Kinda makes me wonder how/All the things that made us great/Are left so far behind.

“Creedence Song,” a funky acknowledgement of the past he ignored onstage for years is followed by “Broken Down Cowboy,” where the melody and the sadness in Fogerty’s voice surpasses the lyrics.

The gospel soul of the prayer like and beautiful “River is Waiting,” lulls you into a sense of false peace only to wake you up with the album’s killer track, the nasty blues-infused, “Long Dark Night,” a blistering indictment of the Bush administration. Over the raunchiest guitar playing he’s ever done, Fogerty shouts, “Georgie’s in the jungle/Knockin’ on the door/Come to get your children/Wants to have a war.” Once upon a time this song would’ve been played constantly one every FM rock station, but those days are long gone.

“Summer of Love,” recaptures the spirit of the summer of ’67, but the guitar is a tribute to Jimi Hendrix. The rockabilly “It Ain’t Right,” angrily targets any of the starlets (think Britney Spears) who dominate magazines and cable TV news with their in and out of rehab escapades. The song pales in comparison to the amazing, “I Can’t Take It No More.” In less than a minute and a half, and rocking as hard as Little Richard ever did, Fogerty says everything that needs to be said about George Bush and the war in Iraq:

You know you lied about the casualties/You know you lied about the WMDs/You know you lied about the detainees/All over this world.

The two closing tracks, “Somebody Help Me” and “Longshot” revisit the swamp boogie grooves Fogerty has explored for years with his guitar playing dominating both.

While not every track is a standout, the best songs are incredibly powerful and with Fogerty singing, writing and playing in top form, those songs are as good as it gets.

